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ABSTRACT

The Cleveland Conference, which dates from 1915, is an annual gathering of leading figures in university schools of education, government, state and city school superintendents, foundations, policy institutes, and education commissions. Growing from its original 4 members to the present 100 limit, and broadening its membership to include a few women and racial minorities, the members meet to discuss issues in education and related fields, and share information in informal and private ways meant to differ from the increasingly large and highly structured professional organization to which its members also belong. The Cleveland Conference embodies the characteristics and serves the functions of an elite organization, as studied and theorized by political sociologists: a closed and self-selected body, confirming and conferring high status, and advancing the careers or interests of its members. Its influence on American educational policy, though diffuse and generally disavowed by the members, takes the following forms: (1) influencing ideas; (2) influencing projects, government programs, and sources of funding; and (3) influencing the career and employment prospects of individuals involved in the policy network. (Contains 60 notes.) (DFR)

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"SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A NETWORK AND A SECRET SOCIETY": THE CLEVELAND CONFERENCE AND ELITE POLICYMAKING IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

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Saint Mary's College of California

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"SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A NETWORK AND A SECRET SOCIETY": THE CLEVELAND CONFERENCE AND ELITE POLICYMAKING IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

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Abstract • The Cleveland Conference -- an annual gathering of leading figures in university schools of education, government, state and city school superintendencies, foundations, policy institutes, and education commissions -- dates from 1915. Growing from its original four members to the present 100 limit, and broadening its membership to include a few women and racial minorities, the members meet to discuss issues in education and related fields, and share information in informal and private ways meant to differ from the increasingly large and highly structured professional organizations to which its members also belong. The Cleveland Conference embodies the characteristics and serves the functions of an elite organization, as studied and theorized by political sociologists: a closed and self-selective body, confirming and conferring high status, and advancing the careers or interests of its members. Its influence on American educational policy, although diffuse and generally disavowed by the members, takes three forms: (a) influencing ideas, (b) influencing projects, government programs, and sources of funding, and (c) influencing the career and employment prospects of individuals involved in the policy network.

Introduction

The Cleveland Conference is an informal but long-continuing organization of importantly-placed individuals who share an abiding professional, social, or personal interest in education. It was founded in January 1915 when four men met for conversation prior to collaborating in an extensive survey of the Cleveland public schools -- hence the name. It has met almost every year since, although usually in Chicago. The members themselves nominate new recruits as needed. The only officer is the organizer, presider, and keeper of the group's few records; he is called the factotum, from the Latin for "do everything."

In 1993, the factotum, Professor James W. Guthrie, then of the Graduate School of Education of the University of California at Berkeley, invited the author and a colleague, Professor Geraldine Joncich Clifford, to write the first "outsider history" of the Cleveland Conference.[1] This paper is based on that history. It addresses, in at least a provisional way, two related questions. First, by its nature, what is the primary or relative value of this organization: (a) to its members; (b) to other educational communities represented by Cleveland Conference

[1] The Spencer Foundation accepted a research proposal that its officers subsequently approved and funded.

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members; and (c) to the foundations and government agencies that may help fund the activities of Cleveland Conferees, or those whom they raise to notice in their discussions? Second, has the Cleveland Conference had discernible impact on the formation of educational policy and practice in the United States? If so, in what forms, in which sectors, and with what changes over time?

In "*Who's Running America?*" Thomas R. Dye explored the proposition that "Great power in America is concentrated in a tiny handful of men," that a few thousand persons, out of all Americans, decide all public matters, including peace, war, wages, prices, taxes, justice, leisure, and education and learning.[2] By exploring in a small way the nature, role, and functioning of a seemingly elite organization in a professedly democratic and anti-elitist society, this paper aims to address the question of the Cleveland Conference's "influence" in the world of education in the United States -- although the oft-reiterated self-description of the group as an agenda-less annual "bull session" might appear to argue against claims of power over events. Still, that which members explicitly disavow -- the having of power and influence -- is perhaps the best indicator of a reality that few Conferees want even to consider, much less to concede: being part of an elite group, with all that means for the having and using of such advantages as privileged information and social connections with persons of power or influence.[3] As Charles Kadushin found in his study, *The American Intellectual Elite*, many of his respondents, too, were "reluctant to reveal whom they talk to about what."[4]

In pursuing these questions, theoretical issues of wider interest to historians and sociologists have been examined, as well. The paper examines the Cleveland Conference as an organization of elites, and as a somewhat shifting manifestation of what Arthur Bestor called America's "interlocking directorate" of strategically placed school administrators, professors of education, and state and federal school officials.[5] It considers the stable and changing functions of education elites over time, especially in response to enlarged governmental (especially federal) action, to greater demographic and ideological diversity in the active public, especially affecting large city school systems, to the opening of new channels of communication about education through more varied media outlets and more professional meetings, and to changes in the

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[2] Thomas R. Dye, *Who's Running America? Institutional Leadership in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 3.

[3] Especially when the putative link between the organization's members is a common dedication to the interests of a would-be egalitarian system of minimally-differentiated mass public education.

[4] Charles Kadushin, *The American Intellectual Elite* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1974), viii. This paper examines whether Cleveland Conferees can, and may, exploit the information gained and shared at the annual meetings, or in separate conversations among the members, that would not have occurred without the acquaintanceships gained or deepened by their membership.

[5] Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1953, 1985).

everyday political science of education as its politics have become more naked and confrontational in style.

Finally, this paper is designed to make a modest contribution to the evolving debate between the consensus (or "liberal") and revisionist (or "radical") streams of historiographic interpretation of the growth and development of American education. If the Cleveland Conference, as a "closed," self-perpetuating elite organization, can be shown to have affected educational events in this century, this finding would seem to suggest that the existence of the Cleveland Conference demonstrates a system of influence in the hands and service of the privileged and professional classes. But, how determining are the social statuses and professional interests of the principal policy-controllers? And should one consider, as some political sociologists have, whether elitism and democratic politics are, indeed, necessarily or functionally antithetical? Put differently, do the essential processes of consensus-building in a society like ours give elites a useful and even vital role?

Historical Development and Defining Features

Late in 1914, the Cleveland Foundation asked Leonard P. Ayres, director of the divisions of education and statistics of the Russell Sage Foundation, to undertake a comprehensive study of the Cleveland Public Schools. The trustees of the newly-formed Cleveland Foundation, aware of their obligation to spend wisely "sums of money altogether greater than any that have ever been spent from private sources for the benefit of a single community," and in keeping with the most progressive impulses of the time, decided first to accumulate a vast amount of data concerning the city. According to Ayres, the massive education survey was meant to launch a series of systematic investigations into the conditions, problems, and needs of the city of Cleveland.[6]

Among the Cleveland Survey team were Walter A. Jessup, then dean of the College of Education at the University of Iowa, and Charles H. Judd, director (dean) of the School of Education at the University of Chicago. Before the survey began,[7] Ayres, Jessup, Judd, and

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[6] Leonard P. Ayres, "The Cleveland School Survey," Summary Vol. (Cleveland: Survey Committee of the Cleveland Foundation, 1917), 32.

[7] Several historians erroneously concluded that the January 1915 meeting of Ayres, Elliott, Jessup and Judd took place following the Cleveland Survey, *e.g.* "When Leonard Ayres had completed the survey of the Cleveland schools in 1915. . ." (One page history, "The Cleveland Conference, 1915-1925," probably by Charles E. Chadsey, in Cleveland Conference Archives [hereafter CCA]). Also, David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, in *Managers of Virtue : Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 131, state that "At the conclusion of a massive survey of the Cleveland Public Schools, the survey director. . . invited several consultants to review his findings. Their discussion had been so stimulating that consultant Charles Judd and two others

Edward C. Elliott, professor of education at Wisconsin and an already prominent consultant on the school survey movement, held a two-day meeting among themselves at the Statler Hotel in Cleveland, Ohio "for the purpose of discussing in a general way certain educational interests that we thought could be taken up most advantageously in a small, informal meeting, free from the distractions of the large, regular gatherings where we ordinarily come together."[8] This was in January 1915. The interests discussed at this first meeting of what soon came to be known as the Cleveland Conference included the school survey movement, the classification of colleges and secondary schools, "scientific" investigations like the Cleveland Survey in which members of the group were engaged, and other issues of importance to each man individually.

A 1949 historical sketch states that the participants found their first meeting so fruitful that "the dynamic Judd conceived the idea that the group should meet annually."[9] Accordingly, a decision was made to enlarge the group and meet the following January, again in Cleveland. Judd drafted a letter of invitation to sixteen men. He briefly described the meeting that had just taken place, listed the others invited, and in a shrewd display of trust and confidence, invited each new man to discuss the opportunity being offered with someone else on the list should the nominee have any questions about participating. The four organizers and most of those invited to join them were also present the next month, in Cincinnati, for the National Education Association's annual Department of Superintendence meeting.[10]

Referring to the initial group, Judd informed the invitees that,

> We hope that you may be interested in a project of this sort. It is not intended to create a new organization. There are no officers and no dues. There will be no attempt to get a name or a single purpose. It is merely

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suggested that a small group be convened "and the Cleveland Conference was born. Apparently no part of the Cleveland Survey had been completed by January 1915, however. The Cleveland Foundation was not formed until 1914; Ayres was not asked to undertake the survey until later that year; and according to Ayres' own reports, field work on the survey did not begin until April 1915, and was not complete by February 1916 when Ayres spoke of the Survey at the NEA's Department of Superintendence meeting in Detroit. Although the meeting of Ayres, Jessup, Judd, and Elliott was probably inspired by their upcoming collaboration on the Cleveland Survey, it appears that their conversations did not specifically concern it. Local collaborations like the Cleveland Survey were, however, often reflected in subsequent Cleveland Conference selections of new members and its discussions did, we are confident, support Tyack and Hansot's conclusion that these "reinforced the experts' desire to extend their influence" (165).

[8] Charles H. Judd to Don C. Bliss, January 26, 1915, 1. In CCA.

[9] W.W. Charters, "The Cleveland Conference, 1915-1949," 1. In CCA.

[10] The large 1915 annual meeting of the Department of Superintendence of the NEA in Cincinnati may have strengthened the organizers' preference to meet again in a smaller group, as well as given the 1916 invitees an opportunity to converse about whether they wished to join. In his January 26, 1915 letter to Bliss, Judd refers to the fact that "the [four] men who met at Cleveland this year will all be at the meeting [of the Department of Superintendence] at Cincinnati," a meeting scheduled for February 23-27, 1915. Fourteen of these men were present. In "Department of Superintendence, Cincinnati Meeting, February 23-17, 1915, "*Journal of Proceedings and Addresses* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: NEA, 1915): 253-261.

> an effort to get together a small group, all of whom are know to be interested in the development of scientific studies of education.[11]

Judd and Ayres were at the core of a group of early twentieth century reformers who hoped to change the face of American public education by the application of scientific methods or the principles of business efficiency (some thought them synonymous) to the study of school problems. Referred to by contemporaries as "the educational trust," this collection of university presidents, professors of educational administration, government officials, foundation officers and big city superintendents was convinced that the problems of the schools were susceptible to improvement by rational, scientific means. An intense practical interest in basing future schooling on verifiable scientific laws united this small group of academics and practitioners, furnishing the first webbing of a new network.[12]The Cleveland Survey and other activities in which they collaborated made more obvious the advantages to be gained from forming their own small group. Therein was freedom from the distractions of large, undifferentiated gatherings and the vagaries of "unscientific" educational discourse.

Table I lists the men invited to the 1916 meeting (including the four original members), together with their positions in 1915 and the professional positions that capped each one's career.

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[11] Judd to Bliss, 2. In CCA.

[12] Both a primary and a secondary source on the faith in educational science is the Seventeenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, *The Scientific Movement in Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938). See also Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopt, 1961) and Geraldine Jonçich, *The Sane Positivist: A Biography of Edward L. Thorndike* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1968, 1984).

TABLE I

Invited Members of the Cleveland Conference 1915-1916

Name	1915 position	Capstone Position
James R. Angell	Dean of Faculty, University of Chicago	President, Yale University
Leonard P. Ayres	Director, Russell Sage Foundation	Vice President Cleveland Trust Co.
Don C. Bliss	Superintendent of Schools, Montclair NJ.	President, N.J. State Teachers College
Charles E. Chadsey	Superintendent of Schools, Detroit	Dean, College of Education, Univ. of Illinois
Lotus D. Coffman	Dean, College of Education, Univ. of Minnesota	President, University of Minnesota
Ellwood P. Cubberley	Head, Dept. of Education, Stanford Univ.	Dean, School of Education, Stanford Univ.
Edward C. Elliott	Prof. Education, Univ. of Wisconsin	President, Purdue University
Abraham Flexner	Asst Secretary, General Education Board	Secretary, General Education Board
Paul H. Hanus	Prof. Education, Harvard University	Dean, Grad. School of Education, Harvard
William A. Jessup	Dean, College of Education, Univ. Iowa	President, University of Iowa
Charles H. Judd	Director, School of Education, Univ. of Chicago	Dean, School of Education, Univ. of Chicago
Charles N. Kendall	State Commis. of Education, New Jersey	State Commissioner of Education, New Jersey
Paul Monroe	Prof. Education, Teachers College, Columbia University	Director, International Institute of Education, Columbia University
Ernest C. Moore	Prof. Education, Yale University	Provost (Head), UCLA
Henry C. Morrison	State Superintendent of Public Instruction, New Hampshire	Prof. Education, University of Chicago
Bruce Payne	President, Peabody College for Teachers	President, Peabody College for Teachers
David Snedden	State Commissioner of Education, Massachusetts	Prof. Education, Teachers College, Columbia University
Frank E. Spaulding	Superintendent of Schools, Minneapolis	Head, Department of Education, Yale Univ.
George D. Strayer	Prof. Education, Teachers College, Columbia University	Prof. Teachers College, Columbia University
Edward L. Thorndike	Prof. Education, Teachers College Columbia University	Director, Institute of Educational Research, Teachers College, Columbia University

All of these men were prominent figures in the field of education, and virtually all would become still more distinguished. They included one college president, four deans of education and one dean of faculty, five professors of education, three state commissioners of education, three district superintendents of schools, and two foundation officials. Approximately half of those invited chose to attend the 1916 meeting. Although no name for the group was formally adopted, Judd later noted that "the members have used the name 'Cleveland Conference' to refer to the meetings."[13]

[13] Charles Judd to "Those Invited to Join the Cleveland Conference," March 15, 1920. In CCA.

Charles Hubbard Judd was the driving force behind the Conference during its early years. The visionary son of Methodist missionaries, Judd was concerned that the United States lacked a central agency capable of bringing about the sort of change in schools he thought necessary to rid them of their waste, inefficiency, and irrationalities. In 1918, noting that the time was ripe to undertake concerted, intelligently directed reform (for "if we work each in his own place and trust to the spread of reform by the customary methods of imitation, we shall lose the opportunity which the time and the temper of the American people offer us. . . as we are, so is the great majority of the nation"[14]), Judd proposed that the group:

> undertake as the positive and aggressive task of the Cleveland Conference a detailed reorganization of the materials of instruction in all grades. This proposal involves the stimulation of a much larger group of people than that included in our membership. It is intended that we make the undertaking as broad and democratic as possible by furnishing the energy for organizing a general movement at the same time that we stimulate each other to make direct contributions wherever possible.[15]

Judd's advocacy notwithstanding, the Cleveland Conference did <u>not</u> become a clearinghouse for the analysis and distribution of materials of instruction. In fact, a characteristic *collective inaction* marks the group's enduring ethos. That quality, together with its informality, continues to set it apart from other professional organizations. Although he remained a devoted member of the Conference for many years, Judd soon transferred his duties as factotum to Charles Chadsey, a former student of George Strayer's at Teachers College. A review of topics discussed from 1915-'25 reflects Judd's continuing influence on Conference deliberations, though, as well as the larger interest of the group in matters of teaching, curriculum, and educational policy.

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[14] Judd to "Members of the Cleveland Conference," January 21, 1918, 2 and Judd to "Members of the Cleveland Conference," January 14, 1918. In CCA. Judd foreshadowed this proposal in his opening address to the 1915 meeting of the NEA's Department of Superintendence: "There is in this country today no organization which adequately helps school officers in enforcing professional principles. . . . . I cannot cease wondering how sane and rational school men let . . . strong forces develop without organizing methods of directing them aright." Charles H. Judd, "The Protection of Professional Interests," in NEA *Journal of Proceedings*, 270-271.

[15] Judd to "Members," January 21, 1918, 3. In CCA.

TABLE II

Problems Considered by the Cleveland Conference 1915-1925 (in order of frequency)

1. The place of the federal government in the development of public education, including the need for some form of organization that would accord education a more important status.
2. The reorganization of schools and school systems.
3. The development of adequate curricula at all levels of the publicly-supported system of education.
4. Support of scientific inquiry in education and the application of the results of research in practice.
5. The education of teachers and support of teacher education.
6. Improvement of teaching in colleges and universities.
7. Adult education.
8. Week-day religious instruction.
9. The development of distinctive courses for prospective administrators.
10. The supervision of instruction.
11. The development of leaders in education.

The members' unwillingness to follow Judd was, in retrospect, a defining moment in the history of the Cleveland Conference. In fact, the identity of the Conference and its lasting appeal depends in large measure on the members' fidelity to a set of principles and practices established early in the Conference's history. Though largely unwritten and uncodified, these rules of conduct and management still guide its operations.

Principle 1 Meetings are held the first weekend in December, in either Cleveland or Chicago. Since 1920, the Cleveland Conference has followed this rule, with the exception of a 1923 meeting in Pittsburgh. From 1915 to 1920 the Conference met in January or February; in 1920 the group decided that meetings should not be held in conjunction with the Department of Superintendence, however, and the meeting date was changed to December.[16] Since 1962 the Conference has met in Chicago because of its superior accessibility by plane.

Principle 2 The policy is one of no public action, no resolutions, and no written records. This feature sets the Cleveland Conference apart from virtually all other professional associations. The members have consistently determined to refrain from public involvement, keep no notes of conversations, act on no resolutions, publish no reports, and undertake no action

[16] Judd to "Members," March 15, 1920, Charters, 3. Both in CCA.

apart from holding an annual meeting and admitting new members. As one factotum observed, "it leads no public life. The sole purpose is to bring knowledgeable men and women together informally to talk."[17]

There is no doubt that members greatly prize the opportunity to engage in privileged conversation. One called it "a refuge in a storm;" another, a "great off-the-record source of commentary on the major issues of the day."[18] Interviewees consistently referred to the value of being able to speak "without fear of being misquoted, of being able to share [one's] most honest feelings," and of the not-insubstantial pleasure of "being able to discuss issues with thoughtful people away from spotlight and microphones, [a rare commodity] in today's world, especially if you're in public policy, where everything you say has monumental consequences whether you intend it to or not." Whether or not the Conference's "sole purpose" is bringing people together to talk is a different question, however -- one that will be addressed below.

Principle 3 There are no officers except a factotum. Because the Cleveland Conference leads no public life and takes no action during the year, a formal slate of officers is not needed. Instead, the factotum "collects dues (if they are collected), makes meeting arrangements, . . . distributes the agenda, and moderates the discussion. He keeps the minimum of records necessary to give the Conference continuity over the years."[19]

Lacking other officials, the power and authority of the factotum are considerable. Most of the responsibility for the organization's success or failure resides with him, since it is he (it has always been 'he') who chooses or oversees the selection of new members, organizes the annual meeting, and stamps the group with his own imprint. Because the factotum is crucial to the Conference, factotums tend to pass on the responsibility only to those whom they know and trust to be similarly committed to the group's values; indeed, they are implicitly expected to do so. Dynasties are not uncommon, such as that exercised by University of Chicago faculty during the Conference's first half-century, and the recent Tom James-Jim Kelly-Jim Guthrie circle; Kelly and Guthrie were James' students at Stanford University. As best as can be determined, these are the men who have presided as factotums of the Cleveland Conference since its inception, together with their dates of service (ordinarily changing after a December meeting) and institutional affiliations at the time of their selection:

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[17] H. Thomas James, "Information about the Cleveland Conference," 1. In CCA.

[18] From a member's interview. Unless otherwise noted, hereafter unidentified quotations of current members are all from interview transcripts. Where interviewees' gave permission, the transcripts were added to the Cleveland Conference Archives.

[19] Archibald B. Shaw, "The Cleveland Conference: Its Purpose, History, and Mode of Operation," May 1963, 2; James, "Information about the Cleveland Conference," 2. In CCA.

TABLE III

Factotums of the Cleveland Conference 1915–present

Charles H. Judd, Professor and Department Chair, University of Chicago (1915-1922/23)
Charles E. Chadsey, Professor, University of Illinois (1922/23 - 1930)
William S. Gray, Professor, University of Chicago (1930 - 1960)
Francis S. Chase, Professor, University of Chicago (1960, Acting Factotum)
Maurice L. Seay, Officer, W.W. Kellogg Foundation (1960 - 1962)
Archibald B. Shaw, Officer, American Association of School Administrators (1962 - 1966)
James G. Harlow, Professor, University of Oklahoma (1962, Assistant Factotum; Factotum 1966–70)
H. Thomas James, Dean, Stanford University & President of the Spencer Foundation (1970 - '85)
James A. Kelly, Officer, Ford Foundation (1985 - 1991)
James W. Guthrie, Professor, University of California at Berkeley and Vanderbilt University (1991–present)

Principle 4 The dues are minimal or waived entirely. Until recently, fees levied on members of the Conference for general expenses were small and irregular, since the Conference incurs few expenses other than those associated with the annual meeting. In recent years, rising costs coupled with declining university travel budgets for conferences have brought the assessment of a $40 annual fee. Still, membership fees in the Cleveland Conference have never been an expensive proposition, especially when compared to other organizations, and this has promoted attendance over long periods of time for a substantial proportion of Conferees.

Principle 5 Informal conversation takes precedence. During its first years, members would gather for the annual meeting and talk about whatever came to mind for as long as they wished. By 1920, Judd was asking members "to indicate certain topics which should come up for discussion at the December meeting"; by 1949, factotums had begun to prepare an agenda of proposed topics using members' suggestions, to make some general decisions at the start of the first session regarding priorities, and to invite assigned discussants to begin the conversations. For the past fifteen years, formal presentations by some outside speakers have been included.[20]

Despite a prospective agenda, current members recall the Conference during the 1960s as being a completely unstructured group: "It really had no program," said one. "There was no plan of any topics, or anything like that. . . the factotum really did nothing other than call the meeting to order." Although this lack of structure was one of the issues prompting a review of the Conference's viability in 1970, many 'old-timers' recalled it fondly: "I just feel that there's not

[20] Judd to " Members of the Cleveland Conference," October 5, 1920, Charters, 3. In CCA.

enough chaotic organizations around," said one. Referring to the Conference's recent move toward a more formal or structured program, another added that "[the factotums now] operate more like chairmen of any other organization. . . I don't think they could live with the idea that you just travel to Chicago with no plan, and you just talk, and I would love to see that recovered."

Principle 6 Membership is by invitation only. Self-selection of the exceptional by the exceptional is the most obvious factor making the Cleveland Conference an elite organization. It appears the key determinant of its success and longevity, since few other organizations depend so heavily on the membership's initiative and "sparkle."

Election mechanisms have changed over time. During the early years, members merely presented a name that those in attendance discussed and voted upon at once. By 1949 a balloting procedure had been adopted, for members were no longer as likely to be personally familiar with all the nominees. Since the mid-1970s, an "executive" or "steering" committee has selected new members from nominations submitted by the membership; occasionally it helps the factotum determine how many members to elect annually,[21] and proposes new names for consideration if member-made nominees appear inadequate in number or "belongingness."

Stated references to selection criteria are sparse, however. According to Factotum Guthrie, the desiderata for membership in the Cleveland Conference appear to be: (1) being in a position of influence, (2) having a record of notable accomplishments in the education community, and (3) possessing a high order of verbal facility or being given to incisive discourse. In short, the Cleveland Conference still exists "to attract and hold the kind of people who can stimulate and inform each other."[22]

Principle 7 Membership decisions are not openly made. It is said of the present-day Cleveland Conference -- and perhaps of the past organization as well, that it is run by a small group whose identities are generally unknown to a mostly unconcerned membership. Referred to by one member as a "super-elite," these individuals -- frequently friends or close colleagues of the factotum -- play an important behind-the-scenes-role in the selection of new members and advise the factotum on various issues. "There is no formal executive committee or standing committee," explained one member, "but de facto there was one, and they would advise [the

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[21] The number of members was increased to 65 in 1920; it remained at that level through 1970. In 1971 and 1972, annual increases of twenty members each were approved, followed by ten-person increases in 1973 and 1974. Since then, membership has been held at approximately 100 persons.

[22] Shaw, 2; Charters, 2; James, "Information about the Cleveland Conference," 1 (all in CCA); conversation of James Guthrie with Geraldine Clifford, July 30, 1994; in a 1991 letter, Guthrie acknowledged that he had no idea what the membership qualifications were.

factotum], they would have a say on which new people got in." Another confirmed that "for years I was on the executive committee, and there were maybe three of us. And Tom [James] and the three of us would determine who the new members were going to be, pretty much."

Some of those interviewed expressed no unease with having a "super-elite." One of the main attractions of the Cleveland Conference is that "you don't have to take any responsibility for it," observed one member. Another added that if the selection process was open, there would be "contrivances to figure out who would be next, and then there'd have to be debates about whether so and so should be let in" -- the message being that it is better, easier anyway, to leave things as they are. Others said that they were marginally uncomfortable with the secrecy of the process: "I've never been able to figure out how anybody's name was nominated," said one. A second ventured that "It probably was done to keep certain people out without at the same time openly having to discuss why they were kept out."

Principle 8 The rules of conduct are unwritten. Unwritten rules of conduct contribute to the tone and style of the Cleveland Conference and are a key to its sociability and fraternal character. Many of those rules support the expression and discussion of contrasting views without rancor. Those interviewed commented proudly, for example, that there is no "feuding" in the Cleveland Conference, no efforts to "pillory" anyone for an unpopular opinion, and that "you find that people with very contrary points of view can talk to each other, and not attack each other." Another remarked that although there is no disrespect shown in argument, and no unfairness, people "don't pull any punches," either -- making conversations especially interesting. Several noted that they always come away from the Conference with one or two new perspectives. One summed up the unwritten code as follows: "It's an arena, a forum, off-site, privileged in its communications ground rules, in which. . . we get right down to it." Several long-term members demurred, however, about the extent of manifest dissent: "You hear a clash of ideas, [but] it isn't an awful lot of clash," said one. "There was more [conflict of opinion] earlier on than there is now, but I guess that's probably a reflection of today's society: either everybody's at everybody's throat or everybody's terribly polite."

Principle 9 The Conference values both organized and unorganized time to converse. Despite recent concessions to structured talk with assigned discussion leaders, the Cleveland Conference has always provided time for members to "talk about whatever they are interested in. . . for an unpredictable number of hours in lobby, bedroom, or bar." Members consider this one of the most appealing aspects of the Conference -- and it may be its most important.[23]

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[23] Shaw, 1. In CCA.

"I remember we used to meet at the Hilton [in Chicago]," one member recalled, "and they had a club room, and that's really where fifty percent of the conversations took place, after the Conference. Everybody was staying in the same hotel, and we'd all adjourn to the bar, and then groups would go out to dinner, two, three, four at a time." Until 1991, in fact, members were responsible for their own dinners and lunches; once the Conference moved to an airport location, however, meals were organized in addition to sessions. Opinions about the merit of this reform vary. While one member noted that "[it's] good because it forces us to sit down with people we don't really know particularly well," most seemed to regret the loss of spontaneity and intimacy, and the opportunity to meet in a small, shifting group with one's friends or "people whose works I've read, but never. . . conversed with." The freedom to gather in private groups also provides a safety valve or outlet for members whose interests or experience differ from those of the majority. Regardless, most agree that "the times that are just loose, without any agenda, as in a couple of meals, are very valuable times, because you get into things without planning it, but you do."

Principle 10 The essential intangibles sought and achieved are friendship and social interaction. For many members, informal meetings of this kind make the Cleveland Conference remarkable, and build their devotion and long-term commitment to the organization. Indeed, dozens of members severed their connection with the Conference only by death. When asked what they have found most satisfying about participating, members almost unanimously respond "the people;" "the companionship;" "the friendship." "The main reason I still come is that I see once a year a lot of people who I have known for a long time but don't get together with [otherwise]," said one. "It does have the aura of a reunion," agreed another, "but it is of intellectuals and practitioners." When asked what sort of people he had sponsored or considered a good addition to the Conference, a member laughingly responded, "I knew they would bring a lot to the social table, and their professional competence was unquestioned."

This mingling of the personal and professional stimulates conversation, fosters collaboration, cements friendships and, for some, inspires lasting memories. Not all members admit to a personal loyalty to the Conference, however. One member commented that although its social value should not be underestimated, "Not lots of these people are friends of mine, and [although] I really do look forward to seeing them, I see them in other ways, too." Still, most appear to regard the Conference as an annual opportunity to renew friendships, and for many -- white males in particular -- it serves as a kinship group of contemporaries.

Perhaps the most telling index of the centrality of these ten conventions or unwritten rules to the identity of the Cleveland Conference was provided by a long-term member, who

contrasted the awe and sense of separateness he experienced when first participating with the gratifying sense of brotherhood he came to feel: "You become a member of the club." Likewise, when in 1990 a small group discussed with the membership several ideas about the future structure and function of the Conference.

> The general response to these suggestions was universal agreement about maintaining the core values, functions, and 'feel' of the Cleveland Conference, but considerable dissent about each of the particular proposed changes. The consensus of the group was that. . . the essential ingredients of the Conference remained the high quality of the people present at the table and the resultant dialogue between them."[24]

In sum, throughout its history the Cleveland Conference has differed from other organizations because of its informality, its focus on stimulating conversation rather than official action or formal agendas, its exclusivity and collegiality, and the prestige and authority of all its participants. Membership in the Cleveland Conference remains by invitation only, a fact that has allowed it to reconstitute itself in much the same form for its entire history. In 2000, it was much the same organization that Judd described in 1915: an "informal meeting, free from the distractions of the large, regular gatherings where we ordinarily come together."

"Somewhere Between a Network and a Secret Society": Governance by Elites

In 1949, W. W. Charters, former director of the Bureau of Educational Research of the Ohio State University, prepared a brief history of the Cleveland Conference that conveyed something of its unique nature and attractions:

> The Cleveland Conference may be called a club, but it is one of the off varieties. It has no constitution nor by-laws, no pin like Rotary nor grip like the Masons. It not only has no program of social action but it even prohibits resolutions which are the primordial form of action. It possesses no library, club house, reading rooms, ping pong tables nor chess boards. Its sole objective is to make it possible for forty or fifty men to meet once a year and talk about whatever they are interested in for ten or a dozen hours in session and an unpredictable number of hours in lobbies and bedrooms.[25]

In fact, the Cleveland Conference has always had much in common with each of the groups Charters mentioned. These similarities constitute much of its appeal. Yet, the Cleveland Conference is more elite than the Masons, less formal than a British club, more focused and professionally-oriented than a country club, and more self-consciously aware than an "old boys" club. In fact, it is unique. Sharing some elements with all of these groups, it is a hybrid

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[24] Three-page summary of 1990 meeting, author probably Kelly. In CCA.
[25] Charters, 1. In CCA.

organization perhaps unlike any other. Attempting to situate the Cleveland Conference among other organizations to which he belongs, one member compared it first to a blue-ribbon commission, then to a professional society, and finally to a select group like the Association of American Universities -- before concluding that it was not any of those things.

This singularity is part of its attraction. The Cleveland Conference has no peer, models itself on no other group, follows no established rules of order, and conducts itself like no other professional association. "The group is somewhere between a network and a secret society on a continuum," observed one long-term member. "I mean, people don't know about it, they're not supposed to know much, they don't need to know much. It's invitational only, so it is a fraternal-like group." Other members concurred: "Damned little is known about it, and that's just as well." A third added, "I think it's extremely important that it have no public life, have no public agenda, have no officials, no action. Anything that would give it the appearance of a bureaucracy. All those things [elected officials, selection decisions made openly] - - those would all be destructive to the character of the Cleveland Conference." Along with the great care taken in selecting members, herein lies much of the group's surprising durability.

The Cleveland Conference emerged at a moment in the history of American culture when faith in science (some say "scientism") was high; its founders considered themselves education's "technical elite." More generally, technological development and educational expansion have been seen as forcing traditional social elites, with their "consecrated knowledge," to share the leadership stage with technical elites and their scientific knowledge and values; some predict that the latter will ultimately vanquish the former.[26] In the meantime, one of the functions of organizations like the Cleveland Conference may be to confer on technical elites something of the social power and "transcendent" (cultural and political) values of more traditional social elites.

The now-classic statement about the powers of the ordinary and the non-ordinary among American men is C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite*. Mills claims that freedom from the imperatives of mass society depends on having knowledge and position -- a pertinent insight given the Cleveland Conference being an organization based on information-sharing among well-placed individuals and putative "comers."

> As the means of information and of power are centralized, some men come to occupy positions in American society from which they can look down upon, so to speak, and by their decision mightily affect, the everyday worlds of ordinary men and women. . . . They need not merely "meet the demands of the day and hour"; in some part, they create these demands and cause others to meet them. *Whether or not they*

[26] See Pierre Naville, "Technical Elites and Social Elites," *Sociology of Education*, 37, no. 1 (Fall 1963): 27-29.

> *profess their power*, their technical and political experience of it far transcends that of the underlying population.[27]

Thus, power potential is not an individual attribute but that attached to a social role, since "leadership in the United States today is almost always based on a present or past top position in a powerful institution."[28] The founders of the Cleveland Conference were, without doubt, at the core of the visible leadership of the education world's major institutions and systems of their era. The first national reputational study that included schools of education, the 1934 Report of the Committee on Graduate Instruction of the American Council on Education, listed the ten "most distinguished" schools of education as Teachers College (Columbia), Harvard, Ohio State, Stanford, the University of California (Berkeley), Chicago, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Yale.[29] Anticipating the 1934 rankings, all but two of the college and university professors invited to the 1916 meeting were affiliated with one of those ten institutions, --and those two represented Wisconsin, the home of Edward C. Elliott, which was later named a top ten institution, and the Peabody College for Teachers, regarded at the time as the premier institution for teacher training in the United States and the sole Southern member of this national "hidden hierarchy."

Further indicators of the prestige and elite qualifications of the 1916 group abound. Between 1920 and 1961, Teachers College of Columbia University and Stanford University were two of the three leading producers of education doctorates in the country.[30] Eight members of the second-year Cleveland Conference were Teachers College ("TC") graduates; Strayer, Cubberley, and Elliott had graduated from Teachers College in the same year, 1905. "TC" professors -- Monroe, Thorndike, and Strayer --along with Cubberley of Stanford were among the preeminent education scholars of the day, and Judd, Cubberley, and Strayer already wielded enormous influence in the burgeoning field of school system administration.

The elite social clubs of the powerful rich, about which Baltzell and Domhoff have written, have more elaborate and formal screening and selection processes than does the Cleveland Conference, although there are striking similarities in their restrictively careful and

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[27] C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 3. Emphasis added.

[28] Allen H. Barton, "Fault Lines in American Elite Consensus," *Daedalus*, 109, no. 3 (Summer 1980): 7. Other theorists emphasizing the organizational basis of leadership are G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America Now? A View for the '80s* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1983); Mills, in *The Power Elite;* and T. G. Dye, in *Who's Running America?*

[29] Geraldine Jonçich Clifford and James W. Guthrie, *Ed School: A Brief for Professional Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 51-55.

[30] Ibid., 52. The numerical doctoral production ranking in education of the ten leading schools of education identified in the 1934 report were, in order by institution: Columbia (1), Stanford (3), Ohio State (5), Iowa (8), Harvard (9), Berkeley (10), Michigan (11), Chicago (15), Minnesota (18), and Yale (19).

status-affirming functions.[31] Given the much-proclaimed and cherished informality of the Cleveland Conference's operations, members often do not know specifically how or why they and their fellow leaders were selected. Elevating a member to factotum is neither a clearly formulated nor an inclusive process. The present factotum was asked, in 1990, to serve after a small committee generated and informally circulated a short list of names among perhaps a quarter or third of the membership before settling on him; a general vote was not taken.[32]

At least in the recent history of the Cleveland Conference such background characteristics as religion, gender, ethnicity, or race have never been mentioned as reasons *not* to include a prospective member; indeed they have been put forward as important additional qualifications. Neither have those soliciting opinions been told that "He (or she) isn't our kind or person," or that "He (or she) wouldn't be comfortable in our company." Nonetheless, as an organization of elites, it does not have to be stated that the expectation is that those considered for inclusion *will* be "our kind" of people and *will* feel comfortable with the current members, their interests, and their styles of social and professional interaction, including fast-paced discussions of educational and related matters. In the sense of shared, unspoken assumptions about "fitness," this voluntary association is like those formed by any aristocratic or self-selected group. Their basis of kinship is far more pervasive and determining than, for instance, the happenstance that forms a group of all million-dollar lottery winners.

The presence of implied but strong expectations about the shared characteristics, the prior experiences, present positions, and compatibility of members goes a long way toward explaining the long-time senior, all-male, and all-white composition of the Cleveland Conference; to this day, white males remain the majority of members.[33] Women, ethnic minorities, and perhaps others once assumed unable to fit into the club-like atmosphere of male groups like the Cleveland Conference, are now included, albeit still a small representation. In part this has happened because enough members expected elite organizations to become less exclusive. Supply and demand factors also operated. Among Conferees who are education school faculty,

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[31] See, for example, E. Digby Baltzell, "The American Aristocrat and Other-Direction," in Howard B. Schneiderman (ed.), *The Protestant Establishment Revisited* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1991), and Domhoff, *Who Rules America Now*, esp. 28-32.

[32] He misremembered the date as 1989. Conversation of Geraldine Clifford with James W. Guthrie, Berkeley, July 30, 1994. There is corroboration in the 1990 files of CCA correspondence of some of the process but not of the committee's circulation of names among even a fraction of the membership.

[33] The first change suggested was in age, not sex or ethnicity. In 1957 Willard W. Beatty chaired a committee that recommended restricting new members by age; that "in view of an increasing tendency to select older men who have 'made their mark,' the average age of the Conference members is continually increasing." It proposed that, for three years, new men be limited to persons below 45 and "attention be paid to potentiality rather than achievement." Beatty to William S. Gray, November 28, 1957. In CCA.

the majority of their present students are women. When competent surrogate sons are few and far between, some especially impressive surrogate daughters may find room at the table

The historical and formerly taken-for-granted process of selecting university professors applies to the once taken-for-granted admission processes of elite organizations like the Cleveland Conference. Examining the mechanisms of faculty hiring in the heady years of growth in American higher education following World War II, Theodore Caplow and Reece McGee characterized academic employment operating in what has come to be called an internal labor market dominated by old-boy networks. Faculty positions are held by incumbents who have the determining voice in filling or refilling positions, selecting from a highly circumscribed labor pool, with qualifications that reduce access by women, racial or ethnic minorities, and persons from otherwise deprived social circumstances. Additional barriers included selection criteria that are often quite unspecific, with traditional search and selection procedures vague, variable, and unsystematic or uncodified. While the formal criteria of competence and experience in teaching and research will qualify some traditional "outsiders," the informal criteria of "collegiality" and fitting in" could easily be used to exclude them. The more prestigious the college or university the more closely the habitual recruiting, selection, and promotion processes fitted this model.[34]

Traditional selection practices have been justified as minimizing institutional risk and loss of prestige, as well as embarrassment to persons mistakenly selected and then "let go." Exclusionary safeguards have included giving selectors prior knowledge of the departments and institutions from which applicants come, maintaining contact persons at these and other acceptable institutions, and ready recourse to the telephone and to intimate conversations at social and professional gatherings. Insurgent pressures for equal access to employment, and legal and regulatory mandates for a more public and open process have supplemented, perhaps supplanted, the informal dynamics that once operated. Does this mean that traditional methods of informal information-getting and sharing have been abandoned? Hardly; indeed, many participants in the process probably believe that they are made the more necessary by the concessions made to democratic imperatives.[35]

C. Wright Mills observed forty years ago that elites were becoming uncomfortably aware of how many factors determine whether decisions are the right ones, and of the proliferating consequences of making wrong moves.[36] One way to deal productively with the greater

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[34] Theodore Caplow and Reece J. McGee, *The Academic Marketplace* (New York: Wiley Science Editions, 1961); William H. Exum, "Academia as an Internal Labor Market: Implications for Women and Minority Faculty." (Unpublished paper, American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, April 1984.)

[35] The "democratic surge" of the 1960s and the consequent "excesses of democracy" are the subjects of Samuel P. Huntington's "The Democratic Distemper," *The Public Interest*, 41 (1975), esp. 9-38.

[36] Mills, 295-296. Belonging to an inner circle like the Cleveland Conference functions something like writing for a

fragmentation of leadership in the education community is to incorporate into the elite and "train" select persons representing some of the multiplicity of newer special-interest groups, thereby learning how to deal with their growing assertiveness and sophistication in the contest over scarce resources.[37]

Albeit cautious, the Cleveland Conference's efforts at diversification during the 1980s and '90s came primarily by including more representatives of the expanding places in which policy-makers and educational researchers were working. A comparison of the 1993 and 1920 membership lists by sector of employment is shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV

Number and Percent of Cleveland Conference Members by Sector: December 1993 and December 1920

Type of Employment	Number		Percent	
	1993	1920	1993	1920
Professors of education	26	32	21.8	49.2
Consulting, media, or business organizations	17	2	14.3	3.1
Foundation officials	4	4	11.8	6.2
Federal or state agencies or organizations	11	4*	9.2	6.2
National councils or associations (voluntary) including unions	10	1	8.4	1.5
Presidents, deans of colleges and universities	9	7	7.6	10.8
Private, non-profit educational organizations	9	0	7.6	0.0
Policy institutes	7	0	5.9	0.0
Private, for-profit educational organizations	3	0	2.5	0.0
Professors, non-education	3	0	2.5	0.0
K-12 school professionals	2	2	1.7	3.0
School district superintendents	1	13	.8	20.0
Unknown	7	0	5.9	0.0
GRAND TOTAL	**119**	**65**	**100%**	**100%**

* Comprised of state officials only

prestigious journal: "A journal is important because people who are already important write for it; a person becomes important because he writes for an important journal; and the social network assumes that only important people write for important journals" (in Kadushin, 63).

[37] When one member was asked about the selection and participation characteristics of women members, he noted that Patricia Albjerg Graham was included among "the big boys" because she was "one of the big boys" -- rather than because she had some control over "big bucks" as a board member and later president of the Spencer Foundation. It was her role as Director of the National Institute of Education in the Carter Administration and then Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education that so defined her.

Fewer than a third of Conferees in 1993 were drawn from the sectors from which most early members came: professorships (of education), deans of education, and school superintendencies, together, they were once eighty percent of the membership. The substantial increase (from 1.5% of the membership in 1920 to 26.9% in 1993) was in members from five groups: national councils and associations, private non-profit educational organizations, policy institutes, private for-profit organizations, and professors of subjects other than education. These members do include, of course, former or future professors of education, who are still the most numerous single group of Cleveland Conferees. The decrease in representation of school superintendents, from twenty percent of the membership in 1920 to under one percent in 1993, consistently alarmed some members, especially in the 1960s when it was the policy to downplay the selection of both working school administrators and professors of educational administration in favor of scholars and social science theoreticians. Moreover, former school teachers and school administrators were becoming less likely to be made professors of education, policy professionals, or foundation officials than was once the case -- further diluting the presence of "school people" in the Cleveland Conference.

As a more diverse set of individuals and organizations exerted influence in the formation of American educational policy, with the membership of the Cleveland Conference shifting accordingly, the nature of its discussion also changed -- although not as dramatically nor as thoroughly as one might imagine and some would wish. Table V summarizes the topics discussed during annual meetings of the Cleveland Conference between 1984 and 1993.

TABLE V

Issues Discussed by the Cleveland Conference 1984-1993 (in order of frequency)

1. The reform of schools, including policy, curriculum, teaching, evaluation, and particular reforms such as vouchers, privatization, and new schools.
2. Teacher quality and supply, including selection, certification, and national assessment.
3. The politics of education and the national political scene.
4. Testing and assessment of students.
5. Social issues in educational policy, including pluralism, Christian fundamentalism, and the future of public education.
6. Business involvement in education.
7. Cross-national educational issues.
8. Problems of youth.
9. Federal involvement in education and federal education policy.
10. Curriculum.

A comparison with topics discussed from 1915-1925 (Table II) shows both continuity and change. Issues of school reform, teacher quality and assessment, social influences on education policy, and the federal role in education continued to rank high. Five topics on the recent agenda were essentially new or substantially reframed: the politics of education, testing and assessment, business involvement in education, cross-national educational issues, and youth problems. Discussions of curriculum sharply receded, with the early-century naïveté about the possibility of transforming instruction and school administration into a science much tempered, if not altogether absent.

On the other hand, Cleveland Conference members have been alert to the interconnected problems of the American educational system and the system's relations to national well-being since its inception. Indeed, they have probably been made more informed about how economics, social organization, law, world affairs, and education are linked by associating in the Cleveland Conference than by their institutional roles. Early members attended the Conference because they were intrigued by the prospect of hearing about "the news behind the news"; recent members hope to get ahead of the news. In the words of a current member, "a good program is to pick off a thoughtful person after a piece of research is well underway and tentative conclusions are being formulated, before they're launched around the country." By offering participants a forum for saying, "'I have an idea I'd like to talk about. I don't know whether it's going to go anywhere or not," the Conference has become an avenue for members "to see whether there [are] ways to get ahead of the curve."

Much of this dialogue depends on how representative the Conference is of the key players in the politics of American education, a realization that has prompted periodic reassessments of the organization's vitality. Arthur Bestor, for example, had pictured college and university scholars as having been "muscled out" of their previous role in shaping public school education by non-intellectual, career "educationists."[38] In fact, about the time the Cleveland Conference was formed, academics as a class had largely completed their abdication to professors of education of much of their former involvements with public school curricula, textbook authorship, high school accreditation, teacher training, and leadership of state teacher's organizations.[39] Most academics, as Bestor concedes, were too preoccupied with their own interests in advancing the academic profession, especially on the research side; and most were

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[38] Bestor did acknowledge that the public school-based members of the "interlocking directorate" had taken on a "complex and responsible task, and on the material and managerial side they have conducted it honestly, efficiently, and well." Bestor, especially pp. 104, 107. (Citations are to the second, 1985 edition.) Of the several non-education academics in the Cleveland Conference, the most influential on school practice was Jerome Bruner, elected in 1963.

[39] For an institutional case study of this transition see Geraldine Jonçich Clifford, "Equally in View: The University of California, Its Women, and the Schools," (Berkeley: Center for Studies in Higher Education and Institute of Governmental Studies, 1995).

happy to leave the low-status issues of schooling to professional educators, despite their ritual complaint each autumn about the declining caliber of the freshman class.

However, academics were re-introduced to the problems and policy needs of the public schools in the late 1950s and '60s, supported mainly by federal (National Science Foundation) and the Carnegie, Ford, and other foundations. Scholars' influence on educational practice pretty well ended with most of the discipline-based experimental curriculum projects of the post-Sputnik era. But academics from a broad range of social science and professional fields began to apply themselves to issues like racial integration and socioeconomic stratification, each of which had clear implications for school policy and practice. University-based legal scholars affected education through the civil rights movement and legislative efforts to equalize state school-funding formulas under court orders. Cleveland Conferees like Mike Kirst, Mickey Garms, Tom James and his students, Jim Kelly, Jim Guthrie, and Alan Odden ensured that the organization was kept abreast of these developments.

Thus, membership in the Cleveland Conference was being broadened to include new people thought "influential in the system of education," those who shape ideas, who test and demonstrate new approaches, who think, who write, who lead advocacy organizations." Persons like Blandina Ramirez of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and Berkeley law professor John Coons, a driving force behind both the precedent-making court decision on California's school finance system (*Serrano v. Priest*) and school voucher initiatives, brought activist as well as theoretical credentials. Reflecting on shaping educational policy since World War II, a Cleveland Conferee mused, "It seems to me that the non-educator intellectual impact has grown fairly radically in the second half of the century. . . I mean, coming to terms with race and disadvantage in education has got to have been the central force in shifting educational policy [during this period]. . . and the players in that were political and intellectual and not educators." Others agreed: "It was because other people began to get into education that it [again became] important."

While new ties were being formed, others were unraveling. The close community of interest linking public school administrators and university departments of education -- much stronger when Bestor first wrote than that existing between university educationists and other academics on their own campuses -- has weakened greatly in recent decades. Notwithstanding the Conference's tendency to include representatives from the same public school districts over extended periods of time,[40] it has become arguably more difficult for members to identify the

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[40] An example of this tendency is the superintendency of the Newton, Massachusetts public schools: Frank Spaulding, one of the 1916-inducted members of the Conference, had been superintendent in Newton (along with Cleveland and three other cities). Harold ("Doc") Howe, a later Newton superintendent, became a Cleveland Conferee in 1966, as U. S. Commissioner of Education. Howe had also been superintendent in Scarsdale, where he

nation's key - and distinguished - school superintendents and other practitioners, given the brutal political and fiscal instability of local school districts, especially in the nation's largest cities, along with their revolving-door leadership.

The underrepresentation of practitioners is thought by some Cleveland Conferees to be regrettable. As one commented, "If there isn't a richer understanding of the reality of the field, then you don't have a good sense of what the important questions are." Others tend to believe that the pendulum of influence in educational circles has ineluctably moved in recent years, even beyond importantly-located superintendents and principals. In any event, the fragmentation of power among old blocs (professional administrators, school boards, traditional local political and cultural elites), and new contenders (employee unions, language minorities, spokespersons for the handicapped, etc.) is a contributing factor to the lesser ability of current Conferees either to identify potential members who have "made a difference" or to have confidence about their future leadership potential in district or state school administration.

Theoretically, foundation officials represent "non-educators" -- although some, like Lilly's Joan Lipsitz, come with background in teaching. Regardless, philanthropy's "social venture capital" has invested in American pre-collegiate education at least since Rockefeller's General Education Board (GEB) intervened on behalf of southern blacks, beginning before 1900, through the Carnegie Foundation's sponsorship of a multi-volume series of studies on virtually all aspects of higher education. As Thomas Dye points out, "The power of the nation's major foundations rests in their influence over major *new* directions in research and creativity," in contrast to the greater conservatism in government-funded research and development.[41]

And from GEB's Abraham Flexner in the early years to John Gardner, president of the Carnegie Foundation and later Lyndon Johnson's Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, the Cleveland Conference has had a continuous claim on well-placed foundation officials. The Ford Foundation emerged only in 1942, quickly becoming, by far, the largest single support of foundation grants to pre-collegiate education -- and Alvin C. Eurich was immediately elected. Multiple trustees or officers from the Carnegie, Commonwealth, Ford, Markle, Rosenwald, Ball, Kellogg, Lilly, Grant, Gund, and Spencer foundations have served. This may help explain Robert Havighurst's point that, although certain foundations funded controversial projects in community control and decentralization of local school governance and administration, generally "the foundations stood by the educational establishment."[42] Thus, by the time that Bestor "exposed"

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worked with Aaron Fink, then a high school principal; Fink eventually left Scarsdale to become superintendent in Newton, and a member of the Conference in 1974.

[41] Dye, 103. Emphasis in original.

[42] Robert Havighurst (a member from 1939-'42), "Foundations and Public Education in the Twentieth Century," in Gerald Benjamin (ed.), *Private Philanthropy and American Elementary and Secondary Education: Proceedings of the Rockefeller Archive Center Conference Held on June 8, 1979* (np: Rockefeller Archive Center, nd.), 8. Ford has

public education's "interlocking directorate," he had nearly a century's example of the importance of the philanthropic foundation to educational policy-formation, school practice, funding, and the conduct of basic and applied research.

The American Council on Education, the Educational Policies Commission of the NEA, and the Progressive Education Association were other beneficiaries of foundation attention. One of the products was the Eight Year Study of experimental programs in selected high schools, directed by Ralph W. Tyler. One of the Cleveland Conference's most influential members for decades (he attended his fiftieth meeting in 1988),[43] Tyler was the first head of the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, another foundation-connected piece of the policy-shaping and power-sharing network of power elites: the "think tanks," research entities, and consulting corporations.

Around 1970, the national media became the most important "new source of national power" in the United States, according to Samuel P. Huntington.[44] The publisher of *Education Week*, Ron Wolk, was added in 1985, although the Conference had long included publishing representatives like Walter D. Cocking (elected in 1934), of American School Publishing Company, and Ordway Tead of Harper and Brothers. With the absorption of educational publishers by industrial or media conglomerates, the newspaper contingent became more congenial, however. Fred Hechinger of the *New York Times* was a member since 1961 and Hope Justus of the *Chicago Tribune* since 1972; as his paper moved from a regional to a national force an education writer of the *Los Angeles Times*, David Savage was briefly a member. Other media were represented by Thomas E. Finegan, President of Eastman [Kodak] Teaching Films, and CBS's director of education, the remarkable adult educator, Lyman Bryson.

By the Bicentennial, governmental spending for education research -- once the province of foundations, universities, and individual scholars – had come to the fore. As education increasingly became a matter of national legislative and executive action, governmental officials at both the state and federal level became much more involved in shaping educational policy. The participation since the late 1960s of sitting and former top U.S. Office/ Department of Education and, later, National Institute of Education officials in the Cleveland Conference reflects this. Conference attention to federal activities generated divided opinion among the membership, however: When Tom James sent out the proposed 1980 agenda, he discovered that

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contributed, more than other foundations, to controversial and feminist-linked projects through its commitment to civil rights and disadvantaged minorities. In Joyce Gelb and Marian L. Palley, *Women and Public Policies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), esp. 46, 49.

[43] James A. Kelly, "Notes from the Cleveland Conference, December 2-3, 1988." In CCA.

[44] Huntington, 28.

> Among the suggestions members have sent in for the agenda, the most-often-mentioned topic was assessing the impact of the recent election on education. The topic should be well covered, for several members from the Department of Education and from the President-Elect's Education Task Force will be with us, as well as many better-informed members. The interest in this topic was balanced by one member's sharp but surly bit of advice to the factotum: "Keep the feds in low profile -- they provide 4% of our funds and I give them 4% of my attention."[45]

The Conference has not yet seen much inclusion of governors, state legislators, and legislative staff members -- excepting North Carolina's Terry Sanford, later a university president, Mark Schinnerer, a former member of Ohio's General Assembly but elected as Cleveland's school superintendent , and Stanford's Michael Kirst, a former member of the California State Board of Education. These groups have become another source of energy for the circulation of ideas concerning education, especially through the Education Commission of the States, formed in 1965, and one might expect their participation to increase.

Businessmen have long been prominent on boards of trustees of public school districts, colleges, universities, and foundations. And business elites visibly re-entered the educational fray in the later 1970s and continue, at state and national levels, to function in various "partnerships" in the multi-sided school reform movement.[46] One would expect to see some of them invited into the Cleveland Conference. That they are few and generally inactive can be explained by several related factors. First, there is an absence of "staying power"; the attention-span of business to subsidiary concerns is ordinarily brief, both in participation in cross-sector groups around broader issues and in more limited projects like adopt-a-school ventures. Second, corporations have fundamental interests, like maintaining the lowest possible tax rates, that often conflict with the values and interests (like raising teachers' salaries) of the other "friends of education." And, third, business social, cultural, and economic thought tends to be more conservative than that of academe, the public school establishment, and the foundations -- and is often hostile to government. Hence the major elements in public education's interlocking directorate can make for uncomfortable companions -- something that the elite club will not knowingly encourage.

The elite of the National Education Association have been included, at least since its Executive Secretary, William G. Carr, was elected in 1937. Teachers' unions have become politically consequential interest groups in recent years: AERA added a Teaching and Teacher Education Division in the 1980s, when Albert Shanker, Sandra Feldman, and Adam Urbanski of the American Federation of Teachers were added, along with Mary Futrell and Keith Geiger of

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[45] H. Thomas James to members, November 20, 1980. Copy in CCA.

[46] Elizabeth Useem, "The Limits of Power and Commitment: Corporate Elites and Education in the 1980s," in G. William Domhoff and Thomas R. Dye (eds.), *Power Elites and Organizations* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987), 152-168.

the now unionized NEA. And while the Conference had long had a headmaster or two from the independent school sector, with Deborah Meier's election in 1990, a "real, live public school teacher" joined this elite. Given the teacher empowerment component of the 1980s school reform movement, such a move might have happened anyway. But it was made far more likely when factotum Jim Kelly became head of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; she was one of its founding Board members.[47]

Influence on American Educational Policy

Queries about the influence of the Cleveland Conference on twentieth century educational policy raise hackles. When asked, members commonly dispute the notion that the Conference has exercised influence outside the walls of the Cleveland and Chicago hotel rooms where it has met in relative obscurity for more than eighty years. Because the Conference's ethos underscores its identity as a private organization that prohibits resolutions, takes no action, and leads no public life, members find it easy to discount the idea that it possesses any leverage. Yet, C. Wright Mills contends that elites -- even those having the greatest power, exploited or not -- are often uncertain and self-deceptive about their power, tending "to be less acutely aware of it than of the resistances of others to its use;" moreover, "most American men of affairs have learned well the rhetoric of public relations, in some cases even to the point of using it when they are alone, and thus coming to believe it."[48]

When asked to consider the probable effect of the Conference on twentieth century educational policy, members' responses varied. A few were quick simply to disavow any at all. Several expressed the party line thus: "I'm not certain that the group has ever attempted to have influence as a group," one explained, "because. . . the Cleveland Conference doesn't have an agenda." Another added, "[Since] there's no publicity given the Conference proceedings -- they're not recorded or bound -- [influence] would only be by way of people going home, leaving there with ideas that they in turn impart to other people." Members could also be positively self-effacing: "Well, I don't know that I could be that grandiose about it," said one; "Whether

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[47] Meier had other major assets, however, having met Cleveland Conference member Theodore Sizer around 1984 in her role as principal of the experimental Central Park East Secondary School, as president of the Center for Collaborative Education attaching her schools network to Sizer's national Coalition for Essential Schools, by participating in the Holmes Group of schools of education, and becoming, in 1987, the first teacher to win a MacArthur Award. In Susan McIntosh Lloyd, "Deborah W. Meier," in Maxine Schwartz Seller (ed.), *Women Educators in the United States, 1820-1993* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1994), 320-324.

[48] Mills, 4-5.

[educational policy] has been impacted in any significant way, I tend to doubt." Another member, singling out Tyack and Hansot's interpretation, declared:

> David Tyack wrote a little thing in *Managers of Virtue* about the Cleveland Conference, in which he said something about its influence, and I just laughed at it. It was in a discussion of where policy is made, and I just laughed . . . . He used to be a member. . . he knows better than that. He knows perfectly well this organization has no influence on policy, none at all, and is not aimed to, it isn't intended to, it doesn't try to, it didn't try to. It's a place where people get ideas about stuff. The minute the Cleveland Conference begins to pretend that it has some influence on policy, it will lose its soul.

While it is possible to claim that the Cleveland Conference "has no influence on policy [because it] isn't intended to," it has always been a good deal more than a discussion group: it is an exclusive, privileged, fraternal network of elites -- of persons in influential roles in education or related professions. However heartfelt its intellectual motive, ideas are neither epiphenomenal nor the sole currency in which the Cleveland Conference deals. The hidden hierarchies of privilege and influence exist, however much Conferees, like members of other elite organizations, would avert their gaze. Granted, the Conference's mechanisms for exerting influence are oblique, largely unstated, and difficult to measure.

One cannot equate an absence of collective activity with an absence of influence on education policy, however. The individuals who comprise the Cleveland Conference need not act concertedly, as a collective entity, in order to contemplate, undertake, and share work that directly affects the shape and quality of American educational thought and its implementation. Rather, it seems more credible to see power and influence as a staple of the Conference's operations to the extent that the actions of individuals or subsets of members are inspired, enhanced, furthered, or facilitated by their involvement in this organization -- as some are to a considerable extent.

By design, the Cleveland Conference has always been a group of influentials. It is inconceivable that it could be otherwise, given the reputations, positions, and connections of its carefully selected membership. During the early years of the Conference, in particular, members were interested in little other than the opportunity to reshape schooling, and they used the group as a forum to confirm the rightness of their thinking. While it is indisputable that the Conference has at no time since committed itself to an active role in the formation of American educational policy -- nor is not likely to do so in the future -- policy development can be a diffuse undertaking. It occurs over the course of months, even years, and the major qualification for involvement in policy formation may be a sustained and knowledgeable interest in the issues under discussion. The fact is that, by and large, the members of the Cleveland Conference *are* interested in influencing national educational policy; indeed, were they not the Conference would not be interested in them as individuals. That is why they gather together. And this is subtly

communicated to members. As an internationally-known educator wrote in withdrawing from an organization in which she had "played no part at all" in her five years as a member.

> I was proud to be invited, but I do not really feel like a mover or a shaker, like so many of the members. I am "up" on the literature of course, and do my own talking about what seems to be happening; but I do not seem able to join in the Cleveland Conference conversation.[49]

The influence exercised by members of the Cleveland Conference in the formation of American educational policy and practice generally takes at least three relatable forms. On a scale from least to most direct, these are: (1) influencing ideas; (2) influencing projects, government programs, and sources of funding; and (3) influencing the career and employment prospects of individuals involved in the policy network.

The first form of influence is the most obvious outcome of participation in the Conference, and the one most readily acknowledged by members themselves. Conferees depend, some more than others, upon the Conference as a source of ideas, information, and insight into the major social and educational issues of the day. As one member said, "Everyone sitting around that table can expand your growth and development." Participants report themselves as often coming away from annual meetings with new insights, sources of information they would like to pursue, names of individuals they wish to contact. One referred to the fact that he decided to change the way he taught the next semester after two days of participation. Another noted that the group had been a refreshing and energizing influence on him for more than twenty years:

> When I started coming to these meetings, there were people like, oh, I think Douglass Cater [1972-'76], who was advisor to President Eisenhower, and Wilbur Cohen [1973-'79], who was at one time Secretary of HEW -- nearly the author of the Social Security Act. And who else? Well, Doc Howe, and people from a variety of foundations. And then the old line scholars: George Bereday [1960-'83] was a member. I recall hearing a couple of times absolutely remarkable discussions.

Not surprisingly, members tend to believe that they were selected for their potential to contribute to the dialogue, or because they are regarded as bright or stimulating. It goes beyond, as one member put it, having "the influence that any good dinner conversation would have." "It's intellectual networking at least," one confirmed. "You know, people say things to provoke thinking in one another that might get followed up on, and people will come up to you during the break or slip you a note or whatever. And this is a good network to have." The networking in which members engage was likened to "working the halls" of the state legislature: "The real business of the legislature was transacted in the halls. . . I suppose in that sense the Cleveland Conference is a bit like that."

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[49] Letter of resignation to James A. Kelly, November 29, 1987. In CCA.

The Conference also operates as a forum for the scrutiny of ideas that, after the winnowing-out process, might eventuate in policy. "I think that people with large responsibilities for either institutions or policy matters tended to use this as a sounding board," observed one member who had held both sorts of positions. "I used to look forward to [the Conference] as the place to get sharpened up on a few things I was trying to figure out for myself. . . to inform and stimulate my own thinking."

Between the airing of ideas and their transformation into policy, however, money enters the equation, and the importance of the Cleveland Conference as a "device for the circulation of ideas among elites" becomes even greater. Foundation and governmental officials responsible for the disbursement of millions of dollars annually in education funding have regularly used the Conference to solicit reactions to priorities and ideas. One such official commented that whenever he was asked to lead a meeting session he would "pick something not only that I wanted to ventilate, but [that] I wanted to hear other people comment about and use."

The close collaboration between government, foundation, and academic Cleveland Conferees *beyond the boundaries of the annual meeting* is reminiscent of the overlapping connections that drew early members of the group together to conduct surveys, recommend curricula, and improve school planning and structures. An excellent illustration was offered by Denis P. Doyle. Doyle and Jim Kelly met while both were doing work for the Ford Foundation; their collaboration continued through Doyle's work with the National Institute of Education (NIE) and presumably continued thereafter.[50] In an interview describing their NIE-Ford collaboration, Doyle explained,

> As I needed to learn more about school finance, I turned to Jim, and then he began to include me in his meetings, and then we hit upon this notion of joint funding. I actually did some work with Carnegie as well, [with] Fritz Mosher, who's still there. And Jim had been orchestrating some grant work with the National Conference of State Legislators, who I then hired, or gave grants to; [we] gave them big grants. Jim had done the seed work, and got them up and running, and then we gave them major funding from the government for serious studies of school finance, which also had the effect of releasing Kelly's funds for other, more innovative activities -- so it was a very nice working relationship.

Alluding to similar opportunities, one member noted that the Conference "always has folks in it who either have been in the federal service or [are] going in, and you never [know] exactly which ones might be going in." Another was more specific, commenting that through the Education Commission of the States, the Conference probably "had to have had a fair amount of influence on Congress" and the Kennedy-Johnson administrations in particular. The Commission was the brainchild of Francis (Frank) Keppell, former Dean of the Harvard

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[50] In 1993, Denis P. Doyle was Senior Research Fellow at the Hudson Institute and Kelly President of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Graduate School of Education and U.S. Commissioner of Education during the Kennedy-Johnson years. Keppell was also a major figure in the Cleveland Conference. Albert Bowker, former Chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley and a close personal friend, noted that Keppell "really was responsible both for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and a lot of the higher education acts. The legislation of the Kennedy-Johnson years bears Keppell's imprint. . . and, of course, a lot of people who were active in the Cleveland Conference were kind of his gang." When he was invited to join the Conference, Bowker was participating in the "Keppell seminars" at the Aspen Institute, also a Keppell project and an activity in which "the Cleveland Conference people were kind of involved."

The presence of a diverse array of stimulating individuals among the Conference membership enhances the probability that "deals" can be struck, potentially effecting substantial changes in the structure and practice of education nationwide. Members referred to their understanding of this deal-making process as "how America works." One member observed of a colleague's peripatetic attendance at meetings nationwide, "Obviously, he has insight into the fact that that's what makes America go around, shaking hands and talking with people, even if you don't enjoy it." Others acknowledged the practical value of the organization: "If the Cleveland Conference is to be about how all this plays out as the rubber hits the road," remarked one, "if the conversation at the Cleveland Conference is about where the country's education system is going, and what deals have to be cut," then the capacity to shape events must be considered a key criterion in the selection of members, with few organizations having more potential. According to the present factotum, when members are asked to comment on potential newcomers, negative opinion most commonly clusters around three judgments: the person lacks integrity, is not smart enough, or is dull. A more often seen reservation in the correspondence is doubt about the ability to influence education, however.

This leads to a third way in which the Cleveland Conference influences American educational thought, policy, and practice, the most direct of those yet considered. Members of the Cleveland Conference continue to sponsor each other, their students, and colleagues for positions of authority in educational institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and policy institutes across the country and abroad, in very much the way that their Conference forbears did, and with much the same result. A fairly dramatic rendering of this idea, and its probable influence, is provided in the following account:

> [He] has had a major impact on ten of us who are in; maybe it's six. . . And if you wanted to plot the takeover of American higher education, well, of education administration departments, you'd say, well, I'll get one guy in at Chicago, and one guy in at UCLA, and one guy at UC, and one at Teachers College, Columbia, and one at Harvard, and then I'll pick up some big state universities. My gosh, he did that. This guy influenced. . . well, you ought to ask a few others because he never talked about this, he never displayed, he never told us we were part of a plan, he just said, "There's some folks at Harvard [who]want

> to talk to you." You'd say "all right." I had two degrees from Harvard before I went [to this institution], but what a flattering thing to be invited back. He would never, never tell you you had to take it, but the opportunity would be served up, and then after awhile we said, "What is he doing? Look at where we all are!" There's a grand design here that is unannounced.

The casual manner in which members referred to processes like this, while not necessarily as comprehensively as in the example given, understates the significance of the actions themselves. Ironically, it most thoroughly demonstrates that which the members deny or, in some cases, view with discomfort: the exercise of power and influence in career building: "I tried to get him to be the president of Teachers College at Columbia, and I didn't succeed, one said." Another explained, "Those are all ____'s pals; she was one of his proteges at Columbia." Remarked a third, "___, ____, and people of that sort were people that I recruited to Stanford." There is more: "[When I left,] they offered my job to ___ and ___ [both members of the Conference] and neither of them took it. . . basically, they were too expensive." And, "He was a friend of _____ and that's how he got to be factotum; he was anointed."

It is not unusual for elites to contend that something vital would be lost were their organizations to become either visible or non-selective. Historically, such organizations have maintained low profiles because of the advantages that accrue to their members that are not available to the larger population. After initially disputing the idea that his involvement in the Conference has conferred personal benefits, for example, one member concluded,

> Well, you make it sound very much like it has some kind of professional function. I mean, you know, referring applicants, all that networking stuff. In fact, it does have that function, but how does it compare [to, say, the National Academy of Education?] Well, I find [the National Academy] very stultifying, very elitist, very square, very straight . . . and this group I would much rather attend than go to any Academy meeting.

Earlier this individual remarked that the Conference had helped him build a network that led to invitations to visit the University of Chicago and the Kettering Foundation.

Many of those interviewed were not reticent about discussing these kinds of advantages, however. As one noted, "I've found the contacts here useful to me in the kinds of things that I have done: executive searches, particularly for school superintendents. . . . I've called the people here and I've always had access to anybody in the Conference, and they call me." Reflecting on the unique ability of members to garner resources, another asked "Was it easier to get a grant from the Spencer Foundation when Tom James was head of it because you were a member of the Cleveland Conference? I don't know; I don't think it hurt. Friends take care of friends." A third acknowledged the professional value of the friendships formed during the Conference: "My guess is that over the years a few people have changed jobs as a result of something that was done at one of these meetings, somebody they met or were impressed by or something. Anytime

you get this many people together from all over the country with common interests, I think some good things are bound to happen.

The value of the Cleveland Conference as a network of and for elites is summed up in the following anecdote offered by a long-term member:

> My guess is that if you were aspiring for one of the major, major positions in this business, it would [have to be] a general consensus. . . it's like that group that's in that building [in New York City], the Foreign Relations Council. Some people say that you can't be Secretary of State if there's a veto from the general membership of that group, and most of them come out of that group, indirectly or directly. My office used to be right across the street from [it on] Madison [Avenue]. I'd look out my window and I'd say, my God, there goes Kissinger, there goes oh, every head of state would somehow go there. It's just that important, it's the Eastern establishment, it's the major thing. Well, to some degree, the Cleveland Conference [is like that].

Systems of mass education have long been subjected to discussion of their contribution to the extent of upward mobility. In 1960 Ralph H. Turner introduced terminology that focused on the accepted or predominant *mode* of upward mobility. Two ideal types were compared. "Contest mobility" operates like a sporting event, where elite status is the prize in an open contest, won by the aspirant's own efforts, using his or her own strategies in a more or less fair competition. When the elite chooses its own recruits, *giving* the prize of induction "on the basis of some criterion of supposed merit" rather than it being "*taken* by any amount of effort or strategy," the result is "sponsored mobility."

Admission into an elite organization functions to confirm or reaffirm the individual's possession and exercise of sufficient qualities to justify membership in an aristocracy of talent and privilege; it says, these are the people at the top. That is, those who are selected by the membership are ordinarily already possessed of a record and a reputation as leaders in some appropriate sphere of action, those having some measure of what Mills called "the power of initiation." But an elite organization should do more than that. To be more than a "club," which may sink into smugness and irrelevance, as far as advancing the public interest is concerned, it must also nurture and advance its members' potentialities, and it must seek out persons "on the move" -- "the really promising younger men in American education," as nominators described one of their candidates in 1957.[51] It must recruit and sustain not only those who have "arrived" but also absorb and indoctrinate high potential "comers" in its realm of interests. Thus, it operates to *confer* status as well as confirm it. Opportunity expands with the fact of being included, and by the subtle exercise of sponsorship that accompanies induction into the circle of the Elect

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[51] William S. Gray to "Members of the Cleveland Conference," March 15, 1957, 4.

It is virtually certain that those educators who first met in Cleveland, like those who decided to ensure future regular meetings by creating an ongoing organization, expected that new members would be equipped and eager to climb to still greater heights of personal or institutional authority -- that they would contribute productively to the Cleveland Conference's discussions because they would be contributing productively and regularly to major items on the nation's education agenda, in the present and in the reasonable future. Today the existence of this expectation and its working out in practice can be probed and validated. And the expectation is met more often than not. Like their predecessors, persons nominated and admitted in the recent past have been "movers": from professorships of education to deanships; from assistant to full headship of governmental agencies; from large school districts to even larger ones; from the more limited to the more central intersections of schooling, government, and the private sector, where questions of policy formation, administration, adjudication, and funding come together to get decided. Perhaps the most dramatic example is Donna Shalala: elected as associate professor at Teachers College, she became president of Hunter College and chancellor of the University of Wisconsin before being named as Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Sharon Robinson went from head of NEA's National Center for Innovation to Assistant Secretary of the federal Department of Education, where she heads the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Such promotions bring more headaches, and the possibilities of larger failures, but only because the stakes are higher and the responsibilities, visibility, and potential for "making a difference" are greater. Moreover, even lateral moves (as between universities, school districts, or consulting firms) suggest energy and ambition -- or, in the case of "great cities" school superintendents whose luck has run out, the ability to land on one's feet. In all these scenarios, membership and participation in an elite organization like the Cleveland Conference is an asset.

Conclusion

> Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they found hospitals, prisons, and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society. Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association.[52]

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[52] Alexis de Tocqueville, "On the Use Which the Americans Make of Public Associations in Civil Life," in *Democracy in America* , vol. II (1940).The edition by Phillips Braley (ed.), with the revised Henry Reeve Text

Although professedly an association lacking an intent to "do" anything or "found" anything, with no truth to "inculcate" other than the belief in education, admitting only to the goal of fostering informal conversation among like-minded men, the Cleveland Conference is nonetheless rooted in what Alexis de Tocqueville characterized as the American disposition to form associations to do their business. It was only in America that, by the 1830s, associations had come to "stand in lieu of those powerful private individuals whom the equality of conditions has swept away."[53] In more historical terms, political sociologists see the rise of voluntary associations as responses to urbanization and social differentiation, and to the associated weakening of more traditional and "nonvoluntary" social forms: the extended family, the church, the community, the totalitarian state.[54]

Associations are like rabbits: they breed other associations. The ever-larger professional organization spurs the formation of smaller or more focused subsets of its members. The disciplinary launches the interdisciplinary confabulation. The public, come-one-come-all spirit awakens the private and exclusionary impulse. The Cleveland Conference is closer to what Rose calls the "expressive" than the "instrumental" association.[55] Like voluntary associations of both types, the Cleveland Conference has been prodded periodically to adjust itself to the societal temper and to the other organizations that mark professional life in the modern era: to grow larger and more "serious," to introduce some system and formality into its casual operations, to set an agenda, to listen to non-members, to become more representative by diversifying its membership. Yet, throughout its more than eight-decade long history, it persists essentially as it began: a closed, nearly secret, self-supporting, club-like elite organization whose influence on American education operates through group bolstering of the individual talent, initiative, power, knowledge capital, and influence of its institutionally well-placed members.

In *Managers of Virtue*, Tyack and Hansot include the Cleveland Conference in a section called "The 'Educational Trust': Reform from the Top Down." It exemplifies how influential private networks, along with committees, boards and commissions, and survey teams, create "a potent political consensus":

> To speak of a private network is not to imply deviousness or conspiracy, but rather to focus attention on how educators in congruent positions and with similar values and interests worked collectively in different

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(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945, 1963), 106.

[53] Ibid.

[54] See "The Voluntary Associations" (Chapter VII), in Arnold M. Rose, *The Power Structure: Political Process in American Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[55] Ibid., 214-215. Rose claims that those who belong to an "expressive" association -- professional, recreational, sports, clubs -- join to satisfy the interest of their members in relation to themselves. They may also belong to one or more "instrumental" or "social influence" groups.

> parts of the country under a common leadership. It offers one way to understand how and why reforms nationwide moved in similar directions despite formally decentralized school systems.[56]

As one can now add cross-institutional consulting firms, research centers, and "think tanks," the formation and replenishment of elites appears inevitable in all kinds of societies -- simple and complex, socialist and capitalist. Hence, it is not their existence but their operations and practical effects that need scrutiny.

The Cleveland Conference's organizational identity is characterized by the selection of relatively homogeneous members to minimize hierarchy and maximize consensus, by informality, the denial of power or intent to influence events, and endless discussion. It is officer-less and rule-less. In a classic analysis of how the "loose-fitting garment of equality" fits both conformity and individualism in the American character, historian David Potter has summarized the core of American values. In part, he writes,

> Some people, according to the American creed, might be more fortunate than others, but they must never regard themselves as better than others. Pulling one's rank has therefore been the unforgivable sin against American democracy, and the American people have, accordingly, reserved their heartiest dislike for the officer class in the military, for people with upstage or condescending manners, and for anyone who tries to convert power or wealth (which are not resented) into overt rank or privilege (which are). Thus it is permissible for an American to have servants (which is a matter of function), but he must not put them in livery (which is a matter of rank); permissible to attend expensive schools, but not to speak with a cultivated accent; permissible to rise in the world, but never to repudiate the origins from which he rose. The most palpable and overt possible claim of rank is, of course, the effort of one individual to assert authority, in a personal sense, over others, and accordingly the rejection of authority is the most pronounced of all the concrete expressions of American beliefs in equality. . . . . The unlimited faith in the efficacy of discussion as a means of finding solutions for controversies reflects less a faith in the powers of rational persuasion than a supreme reluctance to let anything reach a point where authority will have to be invoked.[57]

Thus, even in their private, closed organization, Cleveland Conferees appear to be "Homo Americanus" (including the few Canadians); their operational style entails observing this democracy's traditional social conventions, taboos, and fictions.

The United States is also a nation of multiple elites, with power deriving from various sources of influence but almost always involving institutional or organizational bases of some reach. The American system of "biased pluralism" permits groups to have differential power to influence policy -- on the basis of money, prestige, skills, numbers, or organizational position.[58] It also allows eventual representation in "the system" for all groups, with the enhanced

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[56] Tyack and Hansot, 140, 130.

[57] David M. Potter, "The Quest for the National Character," in John Higham (ed.), *The Reconstruction of American History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 216-217.

[58] A pluralistic perspective explicitly shapes Paul E. Peterson's *The Politics of School Reform, 1870-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

opportunity to reach compromise and consensus on behalf of the whole society.[59] To the extent that the Cleveland Conference has been able to sustain serious conversations among influential elites in the several realms of education -- significant school systems, key colleges and universities, well-placed professional schools, resource-rich or imaginative foundations, government, leaders in the bar and bench, committed businessmen -- it has theoretically furthered consensus-making, legitimated decision-making, and given needed direction to American educational policy and practice.[60] Under this model, when, for whatever reason, essential voices in the consensus are not being heard, however -- elites representing local public schools, for instance -- the value of the organization to the larger educational community is predictably much less. Then the primary benefits of membership are to individual careers and, secondarily, to the particular institutions represented by the members.

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[59] Barton, 3.

[60] Barton contends that elite cleavages and unresolved disagreements among elites create the opposite: serious weaknesses and stalemate in decision-making and drift of the kind that paralyzed policy and demoralized American society in the late 1960s and early '70s, and which may be said to characterize the 1990s, as well.